

## Major Tourism Network based at WIT School of Business

The School of Business at Waterford Institute of Technology has been engaged by Fáilte Ireland to develop and implement an active learning environment for tourism enterprises across a seven-county region stretching from Wexford to Kerry. The aim of the project is to assist the small tourism and hospitality enterprise owner in developing his/her business through providing access to a range of training and development supports at a flexible and local level. The mergo project is concerned with four aspects of knowledge transfer: local networks, regional events, research and web communications resources. Tourism providers will, through this project, be able to co-operate on issues such as county-based research and marketing. Up to 675 enterprises are set to benefit from the programme by the end of 2008.

Workshops (called Best Practice Forums) covering issues such as people management, product bundling, product innovation, co-operative marketing, pricing, and regulatory environments are currently carried out by mergo across the regional networks. All participants were asked to compile a Learning Needs Analysis and to develop a Business Action Plan and the topics were chosen based on this feedback. At a practical level, the regional events provide an opportunity for attendees to meet and cooperate with other providers outside their own counties.



The mergo office at the WIT School of Business has since become a source of information for tourism enterprises interested in finding out more about access to the region, funds and support available for product innovation,



Fergal O'Byrne CEO of Irish Internet Association with Neil Lucey, Gougane Barra Hotel at the mergo On-line Marketing Training Seminar in October 2006

marketing and investment in local infrastructure.

Businesses across all sectors are now very much aware of the benefits of collaboration, rather than having a narrow adversarial approach. Through mergo, the School of Business at WIT has pioneered a very effective model for facilitating effective learning networks. It has developed its own best practice model to manage all elements of a learning network (including managing learning sets), and to develop a full learning programme, both online and offline, thereby building on earlier initiatives from the School such as Finestra and Enact. The programme is anchored by trained facilitators (including a number of WIT staff) who are a key link to local tourism service providers in the network. The mergo project also showcases a best practice project management resource at the School of Business, led by Anne-Marie Frampton, which is clearly meeting the development needs of the Irish tourism sector.

Mergo is based at the Waterford Crystal Centre for Marketing Studies, and is facilitating important research activity across a number of key marketing themes in branding and reputation management, marketing strategy, product development, and learning networks.

The three-year, €1.8m project is in existence for ten months, and has already achieved most of the strategic objectives set for the initiative. Fáilte Ireland has indicated its commitment to mergo with the awarding of two additional projects: the development of a national website for the Fáilte Ireland County-Based Tourism Learning Networks and a special learning networks programme in Kerry.

**mergo**  
tourism network

Recruitment to the 2007 mergo Tourism Network has now commenced. Small businesses with a tourism remit are eligible to apply to become part of this exciting initiative. The team would be delighted to discuss your participation at 051 845636/845635. Additional information is available on the mergo website.

WIT is partnered in this initiative by Fáilte Ireland, Cork Institute of Technology, and the LEADER groups (rural development organisations supported by EU and national funding).

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